

Russell Kelfer

There's Good News Tonight!

**Personal Testimony
of Russell Kelfer**

304-A

Series: Miscellaneous Messages

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

There's Good News Tonight!

Personal Testimony
Russell Kelfer

In the dark ages, when I was a boy, there was a newscaster who used to begin his broadcasts like this: *"There's Good News Tonight!"* No one that I know of makes those kinds of statements in today's world. We are troubled on every hand by disease, and pollution, and drugs, and immorality, broken homes and broken lives. And it is no wonder that fears lurk in the hearts of those men and women who have no anchor in this rapidly-changing, rapidly-decaying world.

The fear of dying. The fear of failure. The fear of suffering. The fear of stress. All *legitimate fears*. And yet isn't it strange, that in the midst of that kind of world, we occasionally run into people who are so *happy you can't understand it*. They have a kind of peace, a kind of joy, a kind of inner strength that defies reasoning. In fact, the worse things get in this weary world, the more excited they seem to become. You have all met them. You may even *be one*.

I certainly wasn't one when I was growing up. I was born into a Jewish home; both parents and grandparents were full-blooded Jews. Though I was not trained in the Jewish faith, when asked what I was, I would always reply, "I am a Jew". My parents were loving, moral, and caring. They always taught us good values, but God was sort of a non-entity. He was discussed as though there was one, but not as though He were real or personal. It wasn't until I was in Junior High School that I began to struggle with whether or not there was something I was missing. An interesting phenomenon occurred when I was about 13. It had to do with a church just a few blocks from our house; in fact, it was across the street from the most important place in my life...a little drug store

that had a soda fountain and an ice cream scoop that gave my life meaning. And every day on the way home from school I would stop for my life-giving ice cream cone across the street from the aforementioned church.

Life was not all that swift for me. I didn't feel that I really fit in. I had a visual disability that was quite noticeable, and I had no real meaning in my life. Besides that, I was chafing at being made fun of for being a Jew, when I really didn't even know what one was. So one day my brother and I went into that church across the street from ice cream heaven, and asked the preacher what we had to do to become "Christians." His answer was, unfortunately, that all we had to do was join a class that was about to begin meeting, and on Palm Sunday go through a simple ceremony and be "baptized". We went through the class, learned about the history of the denomination, and on Palm Sunday were baptized and became members.

I had it figured out at last. God needed help, and He had enlisted me to do my part. So I began to go to church, gave money, served on committees, took part in youth activities, and became an active "Christian". Or so I thought. The problem was *nothing had changed*. I was still lonely. I was still confused. And I was still very alienated from God. As I finished high school and went off to *the university*, I figured that if the church was in San Antonio, and the school was in Austin, I couldn't go to church and God ought to understand that. But in my last year in high school, I had met a girl. A very special girl. You know, the kind that only comes along once in a lifetime. We began to date, and even after I went off to school, I would come home on weekends to see her. But she had this ritual. We could date, *provided I would go to church with her on Sunday*. She always referred to herself as a Christian, and I could relate to that, because I wasn't a Jew anymore. So I went.

These guys, however, had a different kind of lingo. They began talking about being "born again" and being "saved" and "accepting Christ as your Savior". They kept talking about sin, and being separated from God, and about Christ living in you. I became increasingly uneasy, wondering if maybe they

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had something I didn't, and I became especially affected by how my girl handled forgiveness. I can remember one time in particular when I had done something that greatly grieved her and offended her, and when she learned of it, she said to me, "*I forgive you.*"

That was more than I could grasp. How could she forgive so easily?, I asked her. She said, *You know, the way God forgives me.* I'll never forget that night. I went home and struggled for the first time with the concept of forgiveness. I went back to school, but my mind wasn't on my books (it often wasn't). I began wondering if *God really does forgive the way my sweetheart had said.* One night I was walking across the campus, having spent an evening which was not at all spiritually enlightening, when I began to wonder if God was that personal, that real, that forgiving to her, *maybe He could be that real to me, too.* I'm not sure what I said to God, but I spoke to Him for the first time as someone who was aware that his sins were like an albatross around his neck, who just couldn't stand the burden of it anymore.

By now, I had heard enough to know that Jesus really died *just for me.* In my ignorance of the right words, I just kind of cried out to God for Him to take over my seemingly confused life. There were no lightning bolts. No Damascus Road flashes. Just a gentle peace I had not felt before, and a quiet desire to know more about the God who finally had become real to me.

Before long, *everything in my life began to change.* My girl friend's mother noticed that I no longer kicked the dog when I came in the door. (That'll give you an idea of what a jewel I was.) I no longer feared the future. I no longer lacked a purpose for living. I wasn't living for myself any longer. It wasn't that all my problems went away. It was rather that I was beginning to see my problems in relation to the person of God.

For the first time in my life I came to the unwavering conclusion that if I died at any given moment, I would be rushed into the arms of Jesus. And so the first great fear in my life (the fear of death) melted into an eternal joy. Death became a dead issue. I didn't have to listen to Satan's lies

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anymore. "There's good news tonight," I could report. Radio Free Jesus had broadcast the song of salvation into my soul, and life now reigned where death once stalked. I had been "born again". Don't ever let anyone tell you that being "born again" is a myth. It is a real, personal, vibrant, eternal, life-changing experience that is available to every man, woman, and young person alive. It is the incredible experience of letting God come into your life and take over your life. And if it has never happened to you, it is not because God does not want it to. I will never die! Oh, this body will give out (it's working on that daily), but the new one Christ has for me is glorious. It's free from pain, free from tears, free from suffering, free from dying. And all because Jesus came into my heart.

I had a second fear in my life. The fear of failure. As a child, I was never *the best at anything*. I can remember many times watching tearfully as they chose up sides for baseball or football, and I would see Norman Nerd and Warren Weakly get picked, and still nobody wanted me. And I don't blame them. I couldn't see well enough to pick up the right end of the bat, let alone to hit the ball. Always, society gnawed at my heels, begging me *to do better, to be better, to achieve*. So I tried harder. But it wasn't long before I realized that you didn't just make up your mind to become Babe Ruth or Johnny Unitas. I begged God to use me, but in my heart I knew that what He really was looking for was *a few good men*. (And I knew I wasn't in that category.)

Then one day I happened to read I Corinthians, chapter one. And much to my amazement, I found a job description for the man God was wanting to use. It read like this:

For see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to to put to shame the things which are mighty;

And base things of the world and things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

That no flesh should glory in His presence.

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But of Him are you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—
(I Corinthians 1:26-30 NKJV)

That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Suddenly it hit me. I took out my resumé and compared it with God's job description. He was not seeking to build His Kingdom out of what the world calls "successes". He chose instead to look in the Dempsey Dumpsters of life for some possible rejects, who in and of themselves were not "the ones who could", so that when *He took control of their lives, nobody could mistake the difference*. It began to make sense. God wasn't *angry over my inability*. *He had chosen me because of my inability, so that no flesh should glory in His presence*.

My resumé was perfect. And as I began to read the Scriptures it became plain that God's hall of fame was a supernatural, grace-filled auditorium filled with the names of men and women who had failed in their own strength. And then God got hold of them...and their failures became trophies of honor which a Holy God melted down in the crucible of love and turned into vessels of pure gold. At the outset, Moses was a failure. Abraham blew it. David messed things up terribly. Peter took his great opportunity in life and shattered it into a million pieces. Adam sure didn't make the nightly news as a success story. No, God went shopping for a few known failures in order to make of them, supernaturally, a portrait of His power. This poem explains what I mean:

WHAT IF I'M JUST A FAILURE

What if I am just a failure?
What if all I've seemed to do
Is travel on and leave in shambles
What I've touched as I've passed through?

What if as a parent
Or a mate I've seemed to fail?
What if I've to crime resorted
What if I've been sent to jail?

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What if I have lost a fortune
Foolish waste has cost it all
What if every turn I've taken
Led me up against a wall?

How can ever in this life
Jesus use a man like me?
How can Jesus use a failure?
What good on earth could my life be?

Friend, Jesus shops for future leaders
Often in the failure store
Often those He picks to cherish
Have been tried and failed before.

But through failure's crushing signals
Oft there breathes a dying breath
And a God of resurrection
Has a life to bring from death.

From the rubbish heap of failure
Sovereign Holiness will choose
Men and women oft defeated
Saying, "Here's one I can use."

So it was to be with Moses
Lead my people out, his chore.
Not until he's failed completely
Could God open up the door.

So it was with Abraham
Father of the world to be
Childless still at 90 then
The miracle of God could see.

So it was, as well, with Joseph
Dad's beloved, dreamer, fool.
Not until 'twas sold in slavery
Could he really be God's tool.

That's the message oft repeated
From the Holy Spirit's pen.
God delights to turn life's failures
Into His successful men.

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What if I am just a failure?
What if all my marks are poor?
You, my friend, may very well be...
Just what God is looking for!

So much for my fear of failure. I didn't have to be a success. I only had to let go and let God be Himself in me. Whatever He chose to do *would constitute success from His perspective, and that's all that mattered*. By man's standards, Jesus wasn't a success. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He came unto His own and His own received Him not. There was no beauty that men should behold Him. The religious leaders mocked Him, His own people ignored Him, and He ended up in a courtroom, found guilty for a crime He didn't commit, and was then executed between two thieves. Success? Oh, Beloved, yes...but from an *eternal perspective*. For had He not gone to that Cross you and I would be lost and on our way to an eternal hell. God doesn't measure success the way we do. So now we can relax and stop trying to "measure up" to a standard He doesn't use.

My third fear was the fear of suffering. I had always been allergic to pain and trauma. Maybe you can relate. So long as life was trouble-free, I assumed that God was "blessing" me. When the clouds formed overhead, I assumed that God was "punishing" me. You can imagine my frustration, then, when about five years into my Christian pilgrimage there came into my life an incredibly difficult physical problem. I was just minding my own business one day when an awful pain shot through my head, totally debilitating me for a few moments. I recoiled from it, wondering what it was, then went on. A little while later, it hit again...this time all but knocking me out. Soon the pain became a regular visitor into my world, coming with increasing frequency. I went to doctor after doctor, but to no avail. I did what anyone who thought they were spiritual would do, I prayed. And I prayed the only way I knew to pray. I said, "Lord, take this pain away, and I'll give the glory to you." The pain got worse. I went to Mayo Clinic. Their only suggestion was to remove the bad eye in which the pain had settled. After great struggles, I agreed. The eye was removed.

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The pain got worse. I wept before the Lord. "Why, Lord?" I cried. "What good could come of something like this?" The pain went on. Weeks turned to months. Months to years...and years...and years.

I am such a slow learner. Finally, one day, I realized what a privilege that pain was. I read about it in II Corinthians, chapter twelve. Paul, it seems, had a similar problem. He, too had a physical disability that was crippling in nature. And he, too, did what he thought he was supposed to do. He prayed and prayed, as I had. He said, "Lord, take it away...amen" God didn't answer. He prayed again. Still no answer. A third time. Finally, an answer. Here is what Paul wrote:

Three times I called upon the Lord and besought [Him] about this and begged that it might depart from me;

But He said to me, My grace (My favor and loving-kindness and mercy) is enough for you [sufficient against any danger and to enable you to bear the trouble manfully]; for My strength and power are made perfect (fulfilled and completed) and show themselves most effective in [your] weakness. Therefore, I will all the more gladly glory in my weaknesses and infirmities, that the strength and power of Christ (the Messiah) may rest (yes, may pitch its tent over and dwell) upon me!

(II Corinthians 12: 8,9 Amplified Bible)

It was as if God said, "There's good news tonight." You don't have to worry about suffering anymore. The more you suffer, the more grace you need, the more dependent you become on God living in you to do through you what you cannot do yourself. In other words, *when I suffered, more of Christ's nature was free to flow through me.* In other words, the worse things got, in the physical sense, the better things got in the spiritual sense, because I was out of the way, and God could reveal Himself to me and through me.

Paul went on to say that it got so that he actually *looked forward to tribulation and persecution and illness and distressing situations*, because when he was weak, *God's strength became real.*

I'm not ashamed to tell you that I'm moving along in the race to old age. This body is weary and worn and tired. But

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if I could go back and remove from my life *any one thing and live that life again, the last thing I would remove would be that pain*. I am so hard-headed, nothing short of that pain could have ever drawn me to rest in the arms of my Jesus. So I don't have to fear suffering any more. Suffering is a privilege granted by God to enable His child to experience His grace. What a precious God we have.

We've seen how God deals with the fear of dying, the fear of failing, and the fear of suffering. There is one last fear that plagues mankind, and that is much more difficult to deal with than the other three. It is the fear of living. The fear of going through the day-to-day routine of making life count on planet earth in the midst of dirty diapers, angry customers, broken washing machines, angry relatives, rebellious children, financial failures, ministry disappointments, and general weariness.

This is perhaps the most crushing fear of all. The fear of not being able to translate into everyday experience, the things God has been teaching you in the secret places of life. I trust that most of you can relate. It isn't what we don't know. It's often *what we do know that we can't seem to do that bothers us*. God has an answer for that one, too. I can remember about fifteen years into the Christian life coming to the place where I was so weary of trying to serve, so discouraged at trying to be, and so sick of trying to pretend that I was ready to just fall before the Lord and ask Him to take me home.

About that time, God sent two things into my life: some tapes by a man named Ian Thomas, and a tiny little book called "Faith is the Victory". The tapes came first. They were huge reel to reel tapes then, and each tape weighed more than the recorders do now. But I listened to them over and over. This man had the audacity to say that *we weren't supposed to live the Christian life. That we were dead. And only to the degree that we got that old corpse of self out of God's way and let Him live through us could we really be free and happy*.

Like most of us do, I fought it. After all, the bottom line was that God didn't need me, I needed Him, and that took away a

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bit of my “self-respect”. Anyway, I ran into that little book I told you about, and the author proceeded to explain in practical terms what Major Thomas had been saying in theological terms. And God said to me, “Kelfer, you’ve got two choices. You live your life or I do. There isn’t room for both of us to hold the steering wheel. Either give up and let Me be the Lord I AM, or you are *choosing to live life in the utter frustration of the flesh.*”

Desperate I was. And so I quietly said to God, “Lord, you take it...I give up.” Nothing dramatic happened. But something extraordinary happened. I began to be more at rest in the midst of life’s pressures. The worrying began to fade some. The fear of not being able to handle life began to slowly dissolve into the process of saying to God, “I can’t do this, Lord, would you take over?” Sure enough, He does.

Progressively I came to understand what Paul meant in Galatians 2:20 when he said:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live,
but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh
I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave
Himself for me. (NKJV)

Paul woke up one day and cried out, “Yippee, I’m dead.” Then he pinched himself and it hurt. So he added. “No, I’m not dead, I’m alive...but no... I’m not alive...Christ is alive in this body... and so I don’t have to live anymore...Christ in me will live through me...all I have to do is...let Him.”

Therein, Beloved, lies the sheer ecstasy of the Christian experience. The decision to rest is yours. The power to live is His. We obey. He lives. We rest. Power flows. The sky falls. It’s not our problem. God owns the sky. We rest in His sovereign love. The car quits. No problem. It’s His car. He’ll either fix it or show us where the bus line is; but either way, He won’t leave us or forsake us, so what could possibly happen that He can’t handle. And if He can, why should we?

That’s good news, Beloved. We don’t have to worry about living anymore. We’re dead. Christ is alive. And He can handle anything Satan or this world might throw our way. Praise God! This whole life is filled with good news.

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You may wonder what happened to that precious girlfriend of mine who so graciously showed me Jesus. She's had a tough life. She's had to put up with me for 37 years. But what a joy she's been, and what a joy she is. And I thank God constantly for giving me a living portrait of the godly woman.

I beg your forgiveness for the personal nature of this testimony. I don't like to share first-person illustrations. They give Satan so much of an opportunity to glorify man or exalt self. But somehow it seemed appropriate on this one occasion for me to do so.

I would like to close by asking each of you here four questions:

1- Are you afraid of dying? Has there ever come a time in your life when you knelt personally at the foot of that precious Cross and gave your life to Jesus Christ? When you do, Beloved, with Paul you cry,

Oh, death where is thy sting? Oh, grave where is thy victory?

Please don't leave here today without knowing for certain, that were you to die today, you would be lifted into the waiting arms of Jesus. Every person who has ever lived or is living is in one of two categories. Don't make it complicated. Either you or "saved" or "lost". Either you have been born again by receiving Jesus Christ or you haven't. If you have, you are secure. Death is no longer a reality for you. If you haven't, you can. You can quietly bow your head even today and confess that your sins have separated you from a Holy God, but that His dear Son Jesus Christ paid the price, and made it possible for you to have *eternal life*. If you do, He will. And you'll shout it from the rooftops, "There's good news, today...I'm not afraid of death anymore."

2- Are you afraid of failure? Do you wonder if God could ever use the likes of you? Have you ever re-read your resumé in the light of God's job description? He's looking for men and women who can't. So He can. He's out hand-picking failures and has-beens and almost-rans to make them "more than conquerors" through Him that loved them. That includes you. He isn't so concerned with your past mistakes as He is with

your present surrender. He'll take even those past mistakes and weave them together into the tapestry of life that reflects a God of grace. That's good news, Beloved. We don't have to worry about failure again.

3- Are you worried about suffering and pain and sorrow?

Don't be. Your God has designed life so that *the very things we would write out of the script were we God, become the heavenly channels through which His amazing grace flows yet the more.* The weaker we are, the stronger He is. The more needy we are, the more needs He can meet. The less of us there is to boast about, the more of Him there is to glory in. So start praising God for tribulation, sorrow, suffering, and pain. They are gifts from a loving God the more with which to mold you into His likeness. Worry? Turn it into praise. Even suffering is a blessing when God is in control.

4- Are you struggling to live the Christian life? Maybe

today would be a good day for you to begin the rest of your life by entering into the "rest" of His life. It isn't complicated. You just stop trying to do in your energy what only God can do in His. No, you don't stop serving. But you serve *in His power*, not yours. You don't stop praying, but as you begin to pray, you ask for His divine grace to flow through you, teaching you how to pray, for what to pray, and why to pray. You don't stop reading God's Word; you read it more and more. But it isn't up to you to obey it anymore. *You choose. He in you gives you the grace to obey.* The choice is yours. The power is His. Just quietly turn to God today and hand Him the steering wheel of your life and say, "Here Lord, I'll ride...You drive." Wherever you take me, I'll praise you. Whatever you give me, I'll thank you. Whenever you call me, I'll follow. But you're in charge, Lord, not me." Then take a deep breath, and...relax. Your problems won't go away. They may well intensify. But they *won't be your problems. They'll be His.* And you'll live in the excitement of watching Him solve them. It's called the grace-life. Or the Christ-controlled life. Or whatever you want to call it. I prefer to call it "The Christian life," lived as God intended it to be lived. And you won't have to fear living life any more.

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I told you. The miracle channel of station WORD is broadcasting the latest up-to-the-minute reports of eternal life. And every newscast begins like this: "There's good news tonight. You don't have to fear death. You don't have to fear failure. You don't have to fear suffering. And no, you don't have to fear not being able to live the life you're called to live. *You don't have to fear anything. If Christ is Lord in your life.*"

THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR, BELOVED

There's nothing to fear, Beloved,
Not death, not life, not sorrow
Not the deadly fangs of pain or hurt
Nor the fears of an unknown tomorrow.

There's nothing to fear, Beloved,
Not failure or weakness or loss
There's nothing to fear in death or life
When you've come to that blessed Cross.

There's nothing to fear, Beloved,
Your God has paid all the price
*So cast all your fears and cares on Him
Surrender your life...to Christ.*

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